

ms. TREE

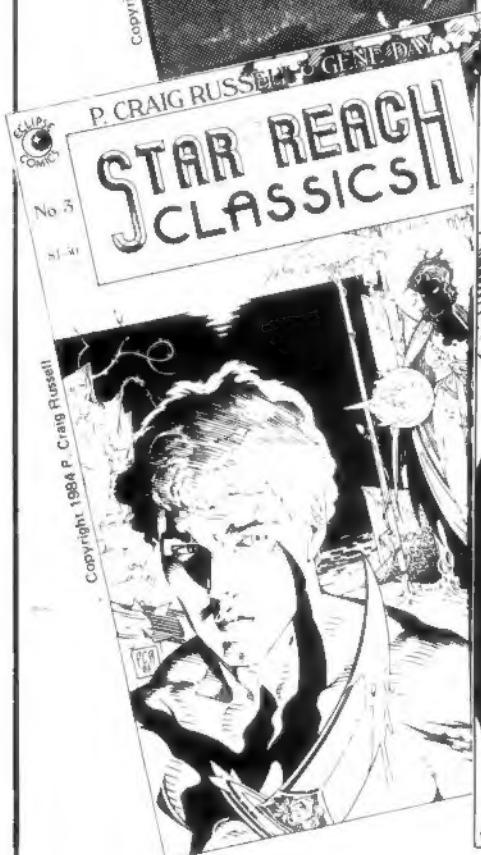
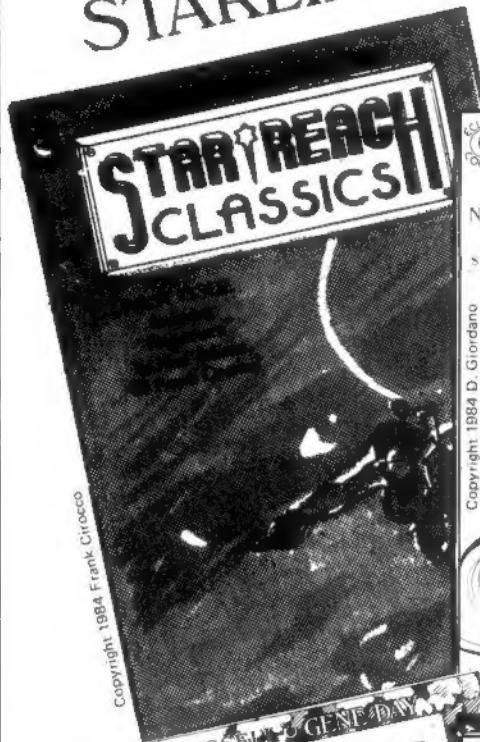
No. 8

Max Collins
and Terry Beatty



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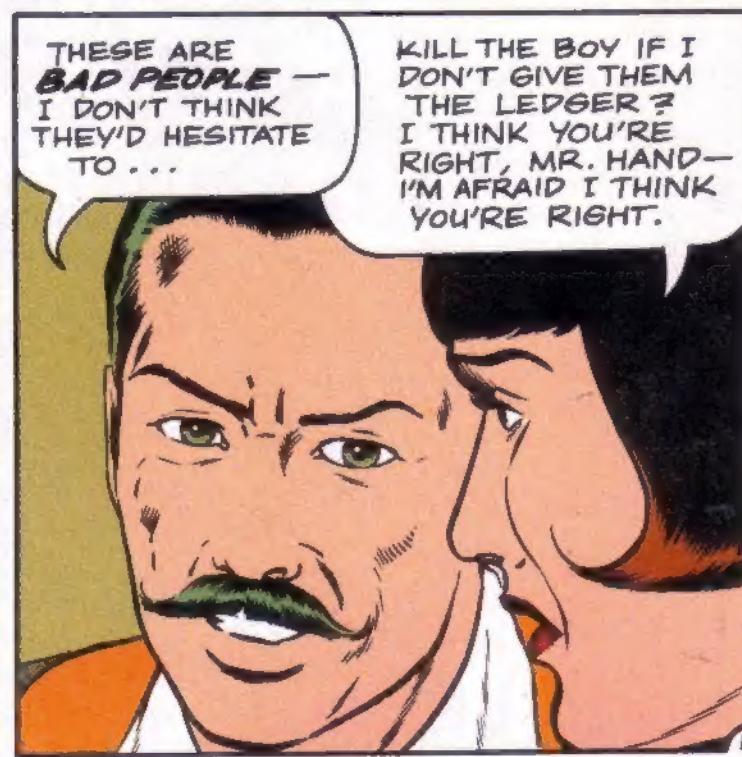
MS. TREE

"THE COLD DISH"

© 1984

Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter Nine



ART ASSIST and LETTERING: GARY KATO / EDITOR: DEAN M. / COLORS: JAN BRUNNER

MS. TREE (ISSN 0737-6170) Vol. 1, No. 8, May 1984. Published by Eclipse Enterprises, 81 Delaware Street, Staten Island, NY 10304. Dean Mullaney, Editor. MS. TREE and MIKE MIST (including all prominent characters in each story) TM and copyright 1984 Max Allan Collins and Terry Beatty. HEAVEN AND HELLER and NATHAN HELLER (including all prominent characters in this story) TM and copyright 1984 Max Allan Collins. All other material copyright 1984 Eclipse Enterprises. All rights reserved. The events, characters and institutions mentioned or portrayed in this magazine are entirely fictional; no resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to institutions is intended or should be inferred. Color separations by Murphy Anderson Visuals Concepts. Printed in Canada.

"IF THERE'S A BALANCE SHEET IN THAT LEDGER," I SAID, "IT'LL NEED ADJUSTING TO TAKE IN ACCOUNT CERTAIN EXPENSES —"



I LET YOU DOWN, MS. TREE —

HOW DID IT HAPPEN, MR. HAND?



"SOMEONE DRESSED LIKE YOU ENTERED VIA THE WINDOW, AS YOU'VE RECENTLY BEEN DOING —"



"TOO LATE, I REALIZED THE RUSE — THERE WAS A STRUGGLE — I MET A BULLET — AND SOON TOOK A BLOW FROM BEHIND. I'VE FAILED YOU MISERABLY."



ANYTHING, M'UM.

YOU JUST REST — WE HAVE TO WAIT FOR THAT PHONE CALL THE KIDNAPPER PROMISED, BEFORE WE MAKE OUR NEXT MOVE —

IF SOMEONE HAD ENTERED VIA THE WINDOW, DRESSED AS ME, THAT COULD MEAN ONLY ONE THING —



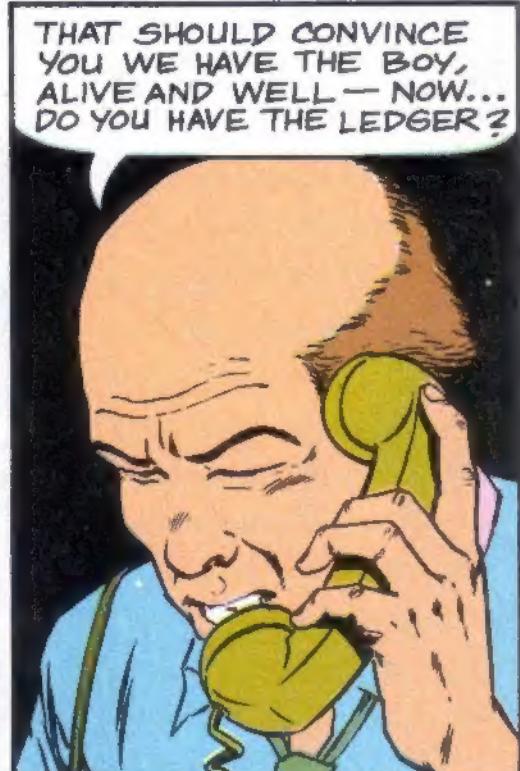
THEY'D BEEN WATCHING ME — WHEN THEY COULD JUST AS EASILY HAVE KILLED ME. SEEMED MUERTA WANTED THAT LEDGER EVEN MORE THAN HE WANTED ME DEAD...



MUERTA'S PEOPLE HAD HOPED I'D FIND THAT LEDGER FOR THEM —



AND I HADN'T.



I CAN GET IT. I'LL NEED TIME — TILL TOMORROW... WHY? BECAUSE IT'S IN A BANK DEPOSIT BOX, SCUMBAG!



CALL ME TOMORROW AND GIVE ME THE DETAILS FOR THE EXCHANGE — AND IF YOU EVEN BREATHE HARD ON THAT BOY, YOU'RE A SOPRANO!



I BELIEVE HE GOT THE MESSAGE, M'UM...



BUT, M'UM — I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY YOU ASKED FOR **TIME** — THE LONGER THEY HAVE THE BOY, THE MORE CHANCE HE CAN COME IN HARM'S WAY...

I'D AGREE ... **IF** I HAD THE LEDGER.

SINCE I DON'T, I NEED THE TIME TO FIND OUT WHERE HE'S BEING KEPT — SO WE CAN LAUNCH AN **ASSAULT AND RESCUE** HIM.

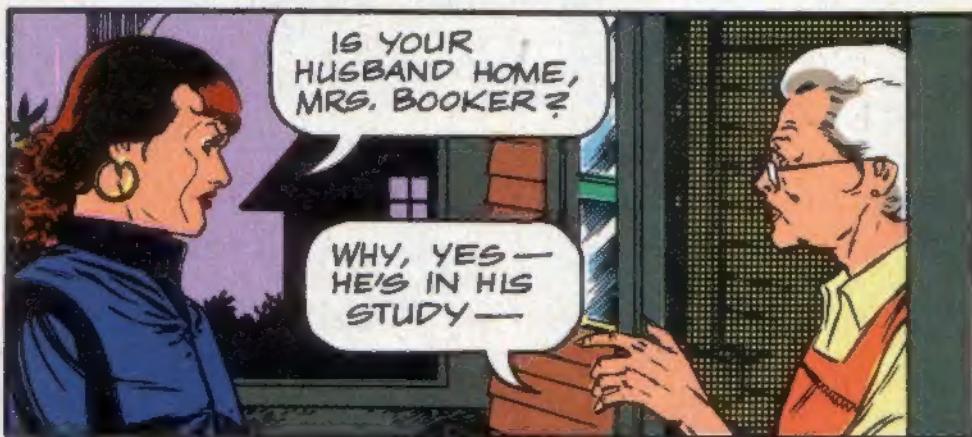
GOOD SHOW.



GET YOUR COMMANDO GEAR IN GEAR — AND CALL ROGER FREEMONT. FILL HIM IN, AND GET HIM OVER HERE, STRAIGHT AWAY.

RIGHTO.

THERE WAS AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE, BEFORE I COULD GO ANOTHER STEP...



WHAT DO YOU WANT?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
THE LEDGER.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT — GET OUT.

KEEP YOUR HAND AWAY FROM THE DESK, MR. BOOKER — I DON'T WANT TO SHOOT YOU ... NOT JUST YET...



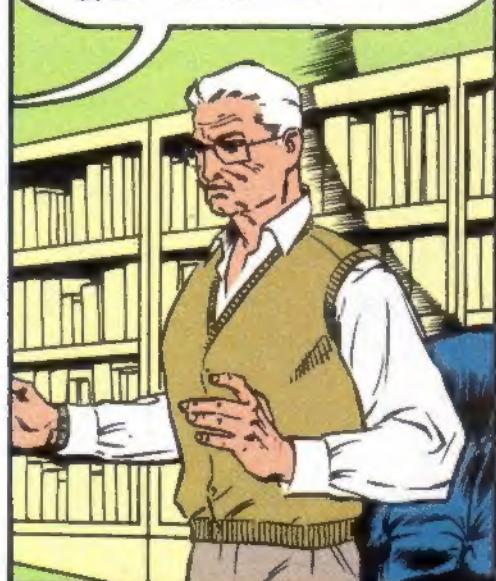
"YOU'RE AN ACCOUNTANT WITH A SMALL PRIVATE FIRM; MR. BOOKER — BUT I DID SOME CHECKING UP ON YOU . . .



"YOU LIVE WELL — NOT OSTENTATIOUSLY, BUT WELL — WITH A CONDO IN FLORIDA AND VARIOUS LAND HOLDINGS . . ."



I THINK YOU WERE DOMINIC MUERTA'S ACCOUNTANT, OR AT LEAST YOU WERE AT ONE TIME . . .



"THAT LEDGER THAT'S PROVING SO EXPENSIVE IS YOUR PRIVATE LEDGER — SOMETHING YOU KEPT AS INSURANCE, SHOULD THE MOB BOYS EVER TURN AGAINST YOU. PRUDENT, IN ITS WAY. "



UNTIL IT GOT INTO YOUR DAUGHTER'S HANDS, AT LEAST.



"YOUR DAUGHTER HAD BEEN RAISED A GOOD, MORAL GIRL — BELIEVING IN THE OLD-FASHIONED VALUES AND TRADITIONAL VIRTUES WHICH YOU GIVE SUCH SELF-RIGHTEOUS LIP SERVICE TO . . ."



"MY GUESS IS SHE MET JASON EDWARDS THROUGH YOU — AND WHEN SHE DISCOVERED HER NEW HUSBAND WAS IN BED WITH MUERTA AND THE MOB, SHE INDIGNANTLY CONFRONTED HIM — "



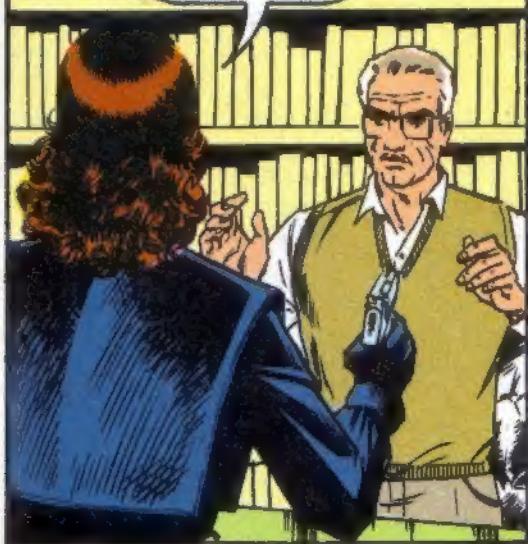
"ONLY TO LEARN THE BITTER TRUTH ABOUT HER OWN FATHER'S MOB CONNECTION . . ."



"THEN SHE SOMEHOW GOT HOLD OF YOUR LEDGER — AND DECIDED TO GO TO THE AUTHORITIES WITH IT. HOW AM I DOING, MR. BOOKER ? ANY MISTAKES YET ?"



SO SHE MADE OVERTURES TO THE D.A.'S OFFICE — NOT KNOWING THAT THAT OFFICE WAS CORRUPT, INFILTRATED BY MUERTA'S PEOPLE.



" THAT PUT HER ON THE MOB'S SHIT LIST — THEY APPARENTLY EVEN ATTEMPTED A HIT ON HER ... "



" SO SHE CALLED IN HER EX-HUSBAND, AND HE TRIED TO PROTECT HER — HE TRIED ALMOST SINGLE-HANDEDLY TO DISMANTLE THE CORRUPTION IN CITY GOVERNMENT AND TAKE ON MUERTA'S MOB ... "



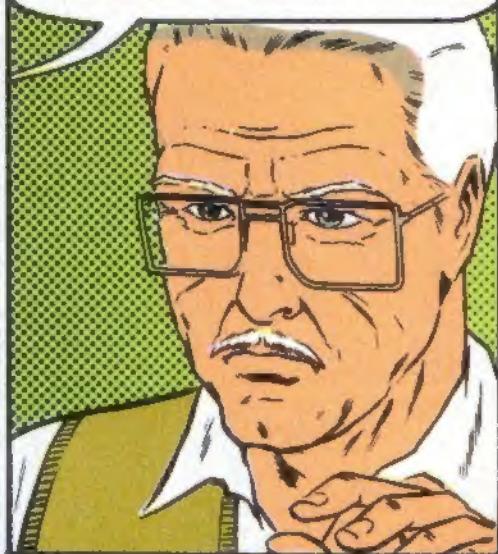
AN AMBITIOUS UNDER-TAKING — BUT THEN MIKE WAS *STUBBORN* — LIKE HIS SON ...



" HE GOT KILLED FOR HIS EFFORTS, OF COURSE ... "



THEN I STEPPED IN, AND ATTENTION WAS MOMENTARILY CALLED AWAY FROM YOUR DAUGHTER — BUT SHE KNEW IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME TILL MUERTA GOT 'ROUND TO HER —



" SO SHE CALLED ON ME, TO TAKE GUARDIANSHIP OF HER SON — IT'S OBVIOUS NOW WHY SHE DIDN'T WANT HIM TO BE RAISED BY *YOU* — "



SUPPOSE I SAID ALL THIS WAS PREPOSTEROUS.



YOU SEE, I DON'T THINK DOMINIC MUERTA IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE KILLINGS THAT HAVE BEEN GOING ON ...



I DON'T BELIEVE MUERTA KNOWS THE **SPECIFIC** CONTENTS OF THE LEDGER— JUST THAT IT'S AN INCRIMINATING PIECE OF EVIDENCE THAT THE DAUGHTER OF HIS ACCOUNTANT GOT HER HANDS ON.



HE WANTS IT, SURE— BUT **YOU** WANTED IT, TOO.



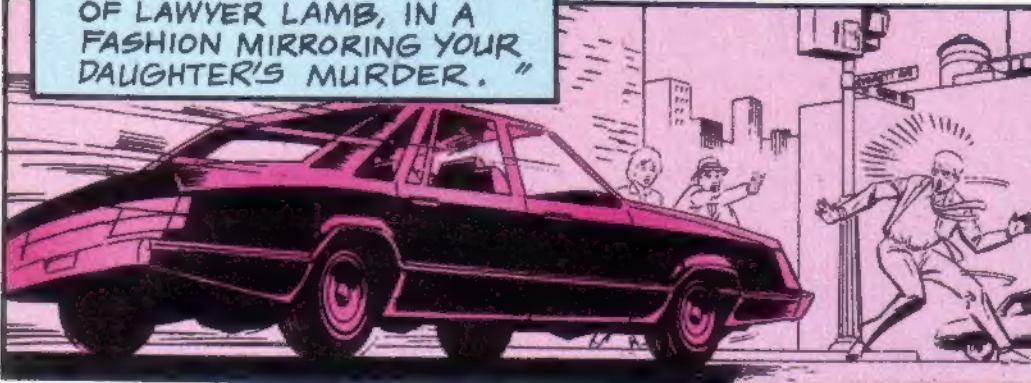
"BECAUSE IF MUERTA GOT HOLD OF IT, HE'D RECOGNIZE IT AS A DOCUMENT YOU PUT TOGETHER FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSES—"



"AND SO, AFTER YOUR DAUGHTER WAS KILLED BY MUERTA'S HITMAN—"



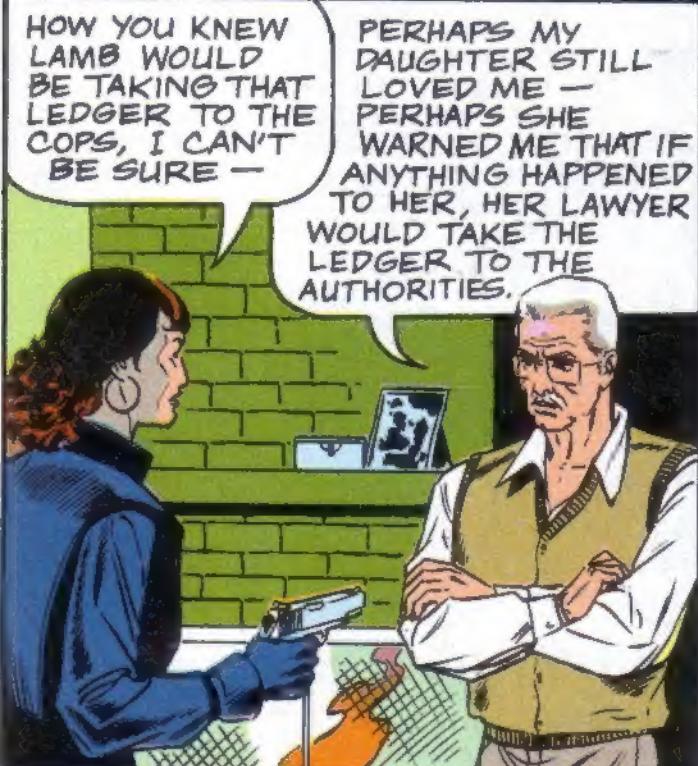
"YOU, ON YOUR OWN, CONTRACTED THE DEATH OF LAWYER LAMB, IN A FASHION MIRRORING YOUR DAUGHTER'S MURDER."



THAT HELPED CAUSE CONFUSION... IT ALSO SCARED MUERTA INTO HAVING THAT POOR SUPERMARKET WITNESS POISONED...



HOW YOU KNEW LAMB WOULD BE TAKING THAT LEDGER TO THE COPS, I CAN'T BE SURE—



PERHAPS MY DAUGHTER STILL LOVED ME— PERHAPS SHE WARNED ME THAT IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO HER, HER LAWYER WOULD TAKE THE LEDGER TO THE AUTHORITIES.

PERHAPS MY DAUGHTER HAD SECOND THOUGHTS, AFTER SHE WENT TO THE D.A.'S OFFICE THAT TIME— AND MAYBE YOUR MUTUAL LATE HUSBAND WAS CALLED IN TO BELATEDLY PROTECT NOT ONLY HER, BUT HER FATHER.



PERHAPS.



WHATEVER THE CASE, YOU HIRED LAMB'S DEATH, AND KILLED LONG YOURSELF—

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I KILLED LONG?

HIS DYING WORDS: "LEDGER... BOOK."

"HE WASN'T SAYING 'LEDGER BOOK' — A MAN GASPING HIS LAST FEW WORDS HASN'T TIME TO INDULGE IN REDUNDANCY —"



HE WAS SAYING "LEDGER," AND HE WAS STARTING TO SAY "BOOKER!" NOW— WHERE'S THE LEDGER?

THERE'S NO LEDGER — AND YOU'VE NO PROOF OF ANY OF THIS...

I HAVE ALL THE PROOF I NEED OF WHAT A CYNICAL SON OF A BITCH YOU ARE—



"YOU TRIED TO KILL ME — YOU SICCED THAT HIT-AND-RUN HITMAN ON ME; AND WHEN THAT FAILED, YOU PLANTED, OR HAD SOMEBODY, PLANT THE BOMB IN MY OFFICE THAT MAIMED MY PARTNER —"

"MY WIFE IS INNOCENT OF ANY OF THIS — SHE KNOWS NOTHING OF MY—BUSINESS DEALINGS. PLEASE, LEAVE HER OUT OF THIS!"



I TEND TO BELIEVE YOU ABOUT YOUR WIFE — BUT SHE OBVIOUSLY TOLD YOU, INNOCENTLY, THAT I PLANNED TO SEE EDWARDS...

YOU CAN'T PROVE ANY OF THIS!

YOUR FRIENDS TOOK MIKE JR., GRANDPA.

WHAT?

THE LEDGER... IT'S DESTROYED... ALL COPIES OF IT...

THERE'S THE LAST ONE...

YOU WORK FOR MUERTA — WHERE MIGHT THEY BE KEEPING THE BOY? WHERE?

THERE'S A PLACE IN THE MOUNTAINS — IN THE WOODS — A HIDEAWAY ONLY MUERTA'S MOST TRUSTED PEOPLE KNOW OF...

I'M NOT SURE WHERE IT IS MYSELF — BUT I DO KNOW ONE THING: JASON EDWARDS DESIGNED IT AND PERSONALLY SUPERVISED ITS CONSTRUCTION —

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THIS ISSUE-

If the Shoe Fits...

BY MIKE MIST / MINUTE
PRIVATE EYE / MIST-ERIES BY Collin
and Betty



DANNY'S UNCLE WAS FOUND LYING IN THE HOT SUN - BUT HE WASN'T GETTING A TAN: HE WAS —

DANNY, WE KNOW YOU DID IT - YOU SAY YOU DECIDED NOT TO GO CAMPING WITH YOUR UNCLE, STAYING HOME ALONE, INSTEAD.



AND YOUR SHOE FITS THIS PLASTER IMPRESSION OF FOOTPRINTS AT THE SCENE, WHAT DO YOU SAY, DANNY?



SHOT TO DEATH! MY UNCLE GONE, AND THEY THINK I DID IT...



BUT A PAIR OF HUNTERS, WHO WERE ALSO IN THE WOODS THAT RAINY NIGHT, SAY THEY SAW YOU AND YOUR UNCLE.

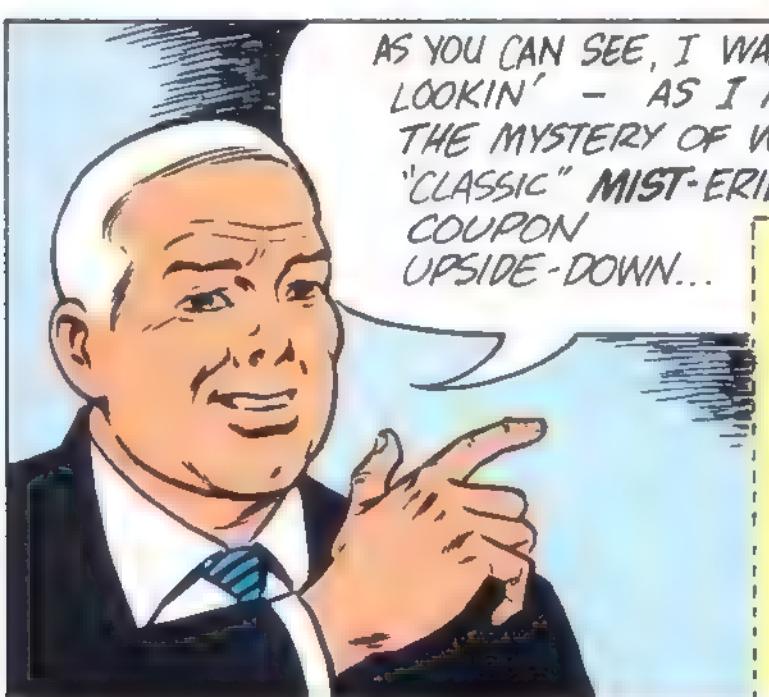


THANK THE MAN, DANNY - HE'S JUST PROVED YOUR INNOCENCE.



THE UNCLE'S ACCIDENTAL DEATH.
THE HUNTERS LATER CONFESS
SHE HAD BEEN THE CLAY DRIES;
FOOTPRINTS MADE IN WET GROUND

AS YOU CAN SEE, I WASN'T ALWAYS AS NICE - AND GOOD-
LOOKIN' - AS I AM TODAY. FOR THE SOLUTION TO
THE MYSTERY OF WHERE 38 MORE OF THESE EARLY
"CLASSIC" MIST-ERIES CAN BE FOUND, TURN THIS
COUPON UPSIDE-DOWN...



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State _____
Zip _____

Please add 50¢ postage per order.

Please send me _____ copies of The Mike Mist Minute
Mist-erries at \$1.50 per copy.

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MEET NATE HELLER -- A WORD OF EXPLANATION

On the pages following this letter column, you'll encounter a feature called *Heaven and Heller*. This consists of the first thirteen days of a comic strip written by Max Collins and drawn by Golden Age cartoonist Ray Gotto of *Ozark Ike* fame — plus a text feature giving the synopsis of the "rest of the first story" as prepared in 1976 for Rick Marschall, then editor at Field Enterprises syndicate. *Ms. Tree* artist Terry Beatty has arranged the daily strips in comic book pages; Eclipse would like to thank Ray Gotto for his willingness to allow these historic strips to see print in this magazine.

For the full story behind *Heaven and Heller*, see Max Collins' column "Strip Search" in the May 1984 issue of *Comics Feature* — which also includes a lengthy discussion by Collins on Gotto's classic *Ozark Ike* newspaper strip. Briefly, however, *Heaven and Heller* is a strip created by Collins at Marschall's request; shortly after Ray Gotto delivered samples, Marschall left Field Enterprises, where *Heaven and Heller* and several other strips-in-development were shelved. Marschall then took on the *Heller* property as an agent (during which time he was also an editor at Marvel Comics, developing the magazine that became *Epic Illustrated*). As late as 1978, Marschall was showing around a revised version of the strip (as drawn by Fred DaSilva, currently the artist of the *Rex Morgan* syndicated strip) and there was discussion of doing a version of it for a black-and-white magazine at Marvel. Despite Collins' concurrent success with *Dick Tracy*, the tough '30s detective strip was not picked up by the syndicates, whose resistance to story strips was (and is) considerable; and Marschall left Marvel before the plans for a black-and-white magazine version of the strip had been firmed.

Private detective Nathan Heller lives on, however, in the novel *True Detective*, published by St. Martin's Press in January 1984. A massive hybrid of mystery story and historical novel, *True Detective* has been called "a masterpiece of research and vivid writing" by the Chicago *Sun-Times* and a "delightful, resounding success" by *Publisher's Weekly*.

Dear Terry and Max,

When I started subscribing to *The Comics Buyer's Guide* to read ads for paperbacks, I worried that comic buying might catch me. Of all the reviews of comics, only the *Ms. Tree* series intrigued me. After tasting the first installment, I went back for the rest. It's the only comic book I buy and is very entertaining.

I used to correspond with a fellow from Iowa who was searching for titles by a home-town boy who made it big in some literary circles with his humorous "Pigs is Pigs." The same author was renowned in other circles as the creator of detective Philo Grubb. The author is Ellis Parker Butler. I've lost track of both my correspondent's name and the name of the town in Iowa that produced Ellis Parker Butler. Is it Muscatine?

I've never read any Philo Grubb stories, but "Pigs is Pigs" was a chuckler that got me wondering about Iowa as a stimulating environment for imaginative fiction.

Bob Speray
San Jose, CA

Yes, Muscatine is indeed the birthplace of not only *Ms. Tree*, but Philo Grubb — or at least those characters' respective creators. Artist Terry Beatty's father is a high

school English teacher (who once threw Max Collins out of his class, but that's another story) and is quite an Ellis Parker Butler buff. We're glad you're a little impressed by small-town Muscatine, being the home for Collins/Beatty and Butler — no one in Muscatine is particularly impressed, however. Though as far as Iowa being a stimulating environment for imaginative fiction, let me put it to you: if you lived in Iowa, what else would you have to do but let your imagination carry you somewhere?

Dear Eclipse,

I missed the Famous Detective Pin-Up by Miller in *Ms. Tree* no. 5. I also miss the title *Thrilling Detective Adventures*, but those are minor complaints with what I consider your best written feature. Talk about pacing — *Ms. Tree* is almost flawless (the ending in no. 5 was a bit rushed). I've really become a big fan of Max Collins' work on *Dick Tracy*, and it's a real treat to see what he can do with more than three panels at a time. Terry Beatty's art seems to be maturing, or could it be Gary Kato is helping to relieve deadline pressure? By the way, after seeing Kato's lettering, I realize how much I liked Terry's more rigid letters.

Chris Stift
Columbia, MO

Reviews on Terry's Leroy-style lettering were always mixed, Chris, and probably the majority found the style too rigid — making for a more sterile-looking page. We're very happy with Gary's lettering (not to mention his fine "inbetweening" on the pencils!).

Dear Editors,

Really enjoyed your comic book including the new paper. Please have *Ms. Tree* wear something besides that blue dress!

Myron and Ann Taylor
Ithaca, NY

Since *Ms. Tree* has a very varied wardrobe, where dresses and such are concerned, I can only assume you're mistaking her blue raincoat for a dress — and you just can't take a private eye's trenchcoat away!

Dear Mr. Collins, Mr. Beatty, Mr. Mullaney, Mr. Goodson, Mr. Truman and Mr. Miller (whew!),

Ms. Tree is one of those comics I buy without hesitation. There are five reasons.

The first, of course, is *Ms. Tree*. Michael Tree is the most realistic female character in comics. Max and Terry, you do such a wonderful job of characterizing *Ms. Tree* that I sometimes forget this comic is being written through a male point of view (I'm assuming the names Max and Terry belong to men, but you never know — after all, if a gal can be named Mike . . .). Also, the plots are well done, and the mysteries are well conceived. I have several suggestions which I think would make *Ms. Tree* better. First of all, try doing stories of lengths other than six chapters. Try some two, four and ten chapter mysteries. This way, the climax could catch the reader off guard, instead of coming routinely every third issue. Also, the next mystery should not be related to Dominic Muerta or the late Mike Tree. Do something different. I'm hoping you'll wrap up this whole Muerta thing at the end of "The Cold Dish." Finally, go back to your original lettering style. It was different and it looked neat.

The second reason is "The Scythe." The stories are good and the art is great. I do have a major complaint, though. The characters are cardboard! Some time needs to be taken to flesh out your characters, Dean.

The third reason is "Mike Mist." He makes a challenging filler. Regardless the length of "Mist," I prefer the one-page mysteries, but just once I'd like to see you try a book-lengther . . .

The fourth reason is Frank Miller's "Famous Detective Pin-Up," another entertaining filler.

The fifth reason is SWAK! Max, I really appreciate the time you take to answer each letter. There is nothing I hate more than editors who say, "We'll just shut up and print your letters this time." When I write a letter, I like to see a response.

I like the slick paper, and I like the new logo, but I miss "Thrilling Detective Adventures." Why not make a new book called *Thrilling Detective Adventures* featuring The Scythe, and devote *Ms. Tree* entirely to *Ms. Tree*?

Robert Carter
Tucson, AZ

Thanks for your terrific letter, Robert. You have anticipated several things already in the works: the next *Ms. Tree* story is "Murder at Mohawk," and is a story independent of both the *Muerta* and *Ms. Tree* storylines, runs only two chapters and features Mike Mist in a co-starring role in his first book-length adventure! However, *Muerta* will be a part of *Ms. Tree*'s world for a good while — he is to *Ms. Tree* what Moriarty is to *Sherlock Holmes* (or what Gabriel is to *Modesty Blaise*). By the way, both Beatty and Collins are quite male, thank you — I'd have Terry tell you himself, but he's off opening beer bottles with his teeth at the moment.

Dear Max and Terry,

Concerning the question of the origin of "Doll" in "Mike Mist," Doll appeared in her own feature on a syndicated page of comics by Max Collins and Terry Beatty called "The Comics Page." This is also where the "Mike Mist Minute Mist-ery" originally appeared. Doll gets her name in Paper "Doll" Cut-Outs, which her feature was sometimes called.

I got this information from *The Mike Mist Minute Mist-eries* book by Eclipse.

Brett Ziegler
Fresno, CA

Absolutely right, Brett! We're sending along an autographed proof of the first *Comics Page* to you, on which Mist makes his first appearance. (By the way — that Eclipse-published *Mike Mist* collection is still available by mail order. Just send \$2.00 postpaid to Eclipse Enterprises, P. O. Box 199, Guerneville, CA 95446.)

Dear Max and Terry,

I've just finished reading *Ms. Tree* no. 4. I've been reading comics nearly twenty years and I'm nearly 30 myself. In spite of all the talk about the glut of superhero type comics, I still read them and (gasp) enjoy them. However, I also enjoy some of the non-superhero comics out. *MS. TREE* is one of the best! However, my 16 year-old neighbor (also a comics fan/reader) doesn't like it at all. In fact, the very things I find interesting about the series, he finds unappealing. Am I correct in assuming that this kind of information is not a surprise to you? In other words, is this series aimed mainly at the adult buyer/reader?

Anyway, *Ms. Tree* is, to me, a very well-done piece of comics literature. Being a small-press artist, I usually read a comic book for the visual appeal . . . however, the words and pictures in *Ms. Tree* really seem to complement each other. It's hard to separate the praise. As I said above, overall it's one of the best and I for one intend to stick around for the duration.

My feelings about the Baxter/Mando debate? I don't mind paying \$1.50 for the comic, but I feel I could get as much enjoyment on Mando paper. Thus, my vote for

Mando paper and a lower price.

John D. Dennis
Davisburg, MI

One thing that's unlikely, John, is a lower price for a *Ms. Tree* comic book. I wish that weren't the case. I'd also like to curl up to the next issue of the book with a nickel Coke or a nice nickel Snickers bar.

Your description of the interplay between words and pictures in *Ms. Tree* is the exact definition of how comics are supposed to work. Much thanks for noticing that we fit into that category.

As for whom we aim the book at — we don't specifically have an older, adult audience in mind; we have an intelligent audience in mind. Probably, we're talking about an audience 12 or older (but not necessarily — though younger readers than that are, I hope, getting some parental guidance, like they say in the movies).

Recently Terry Beatty and I were flown to Houston for a weekend appearance at J. R. Riley's top-notch comics shop, Camelot. We talked to dozens and dozens of *Ms. Tree* fans — signed copies of the book, sold Beatty sketches and original art pages, peddled some Collins paperbacks and hardcovers — had a great time. But the majority of the fans who stopped to talk with us were 21 and older. Usually when someone younger came up to the counter behind which we sat, it was to vacantly ask if we had a copy of the new *Secret Wars*; these comics fans did not notice the rather large signs in front of us identifying us by name, nor the poster on the front door of the shop, or . . . or anything beyond the universe of mutants and long-johns. While I'd like their money, such comics fans are not cut out for *Ms. Tree*.

On the other hand, we find most fans who actually read an issue of the book come back for more. The next time you talk to somebody who actively doesn't like *Ms. Tree* — ask 'em if they've ever read it.

Dear Max,

Have just closed the covers on *Ms. Tree* no. 5 and wanted to drop you a line to tell you how much I am enjoying your efforts. I am pleased to see Terry's art taking a more realistic turn as well as a softer look to *Ms. Tree*'s features.

As to the controversy over newsprint as compared to Baxter paper, I have to vote for the more pulpish look of the newsprint. Not only would the newsprint effect fit in with the mood of your title, but aesthetically I find newsprint more pleasing (I know I'm strange, right?).

I do enjoy the little in-jokes in *Ms. Tree*, such as the hood sitting by the stairs reading a *Nolan* novel. I also like the inclusion of *Mike Mist* and would like to see it regain its original two-page spread (it must be hell trying to jam everything into one page).

Ms. Tree is getting better all the time. Your writing as always is top notch, and I seem to be getting used to Terry's art efforts, and liking them more all the time. Keep up the good work.

I also wanted to let you know that I have recently read *True Detective* and found it to be your best novel effort to date. I hope St. Martin's, who did an outstanding job of packaging your product, sees fit to continue the series in the same mold.

Paul Bishop
Camarillo, CA

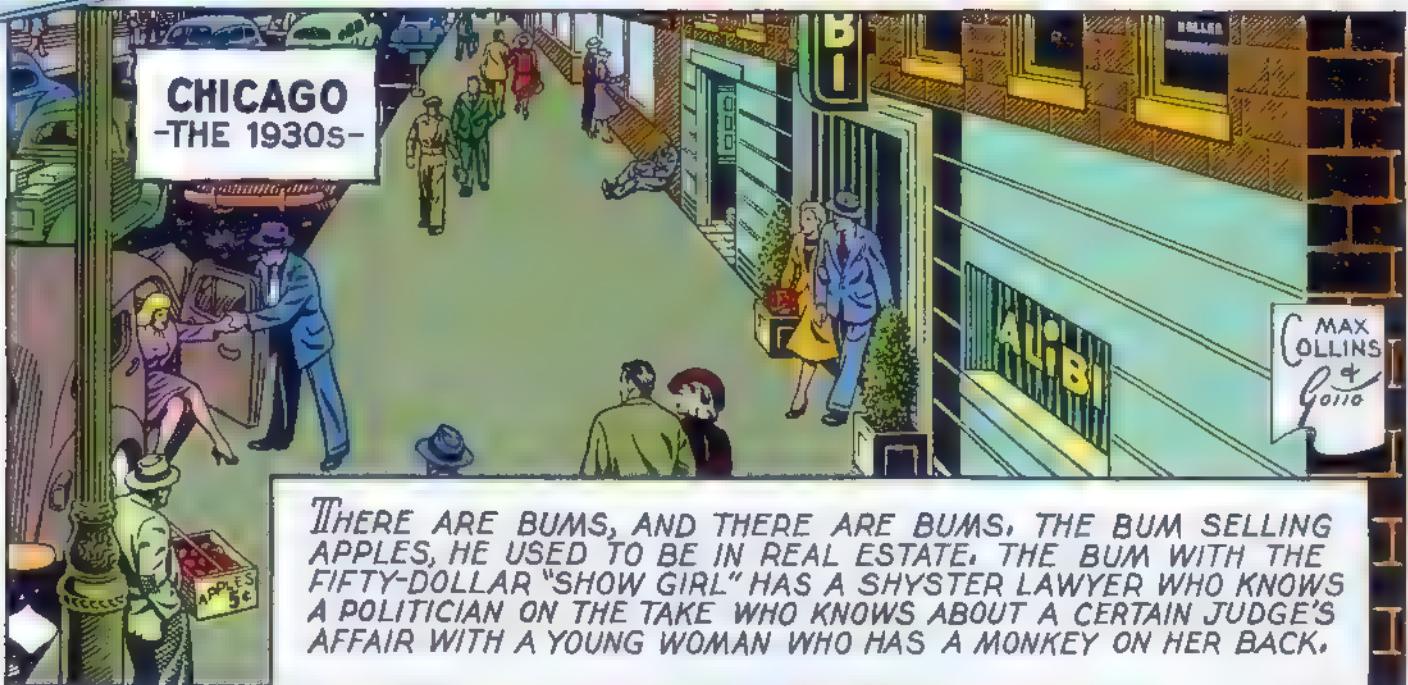
True Detective has been doing very nicely, Paul — it went into a second printing in late February. I've just delivered the sequel, provisionally entitled *True Crime*, to St. Martin's — it's scheduled for March 1985 publication, so line up at your bookstore now! I hope you'll get a kick out of the first adventure of Nate Heller, as written in 1976 and appearing in these pages for the first time anywhere!

(Novelist Paul Bishop is the editor of the respected mystery fanzine *The Thieftaker Journals*.)

— Max Allan Collins

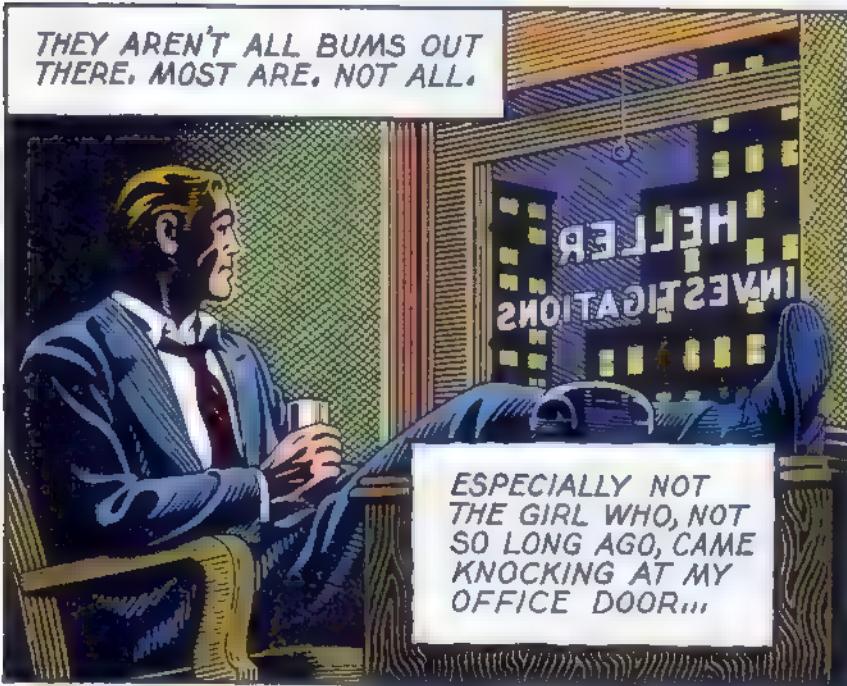
Heaven AND HELLER

WRITTEN BY MAX COLLINS
DRAWN BY RAY GOTTO
COLORED BY CATHERINE YRONWODE
& M YAKO GRAHAM

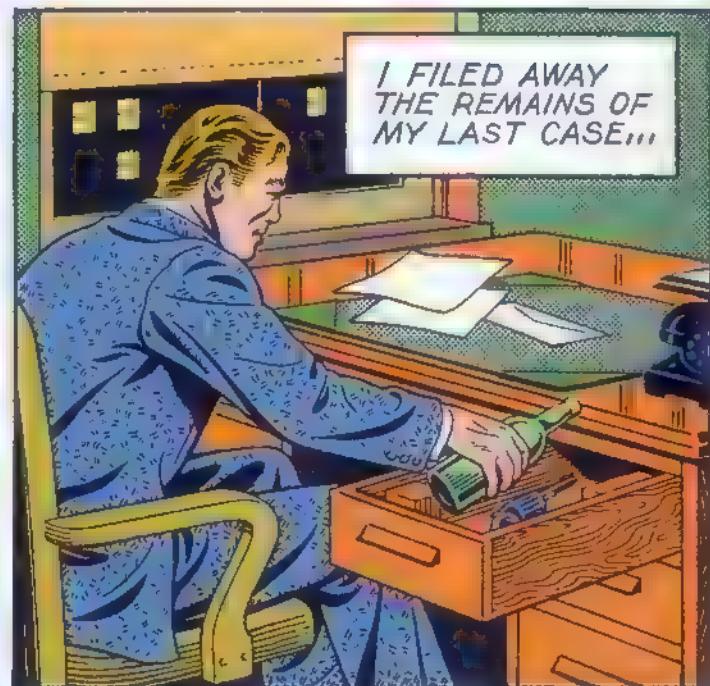


THERE ARE BUMS, AND THERE ARE BUMS. THE BUM SELLING APPLES, HE USED TO BE IN REAL ESTATE. THE BUM WITH THE FIFTY-DOLLAR "SHOW GIRL" HAS A SHYSTER LAWYER WHO KNOWS A POLITICIAN ON THE TAKE WHO KNOWS ABOUT A CERTAIN JUDGE'S AFFAIR WITH A YOUNG WOMAN WHO HAS A MONKEY ON HER BACK.

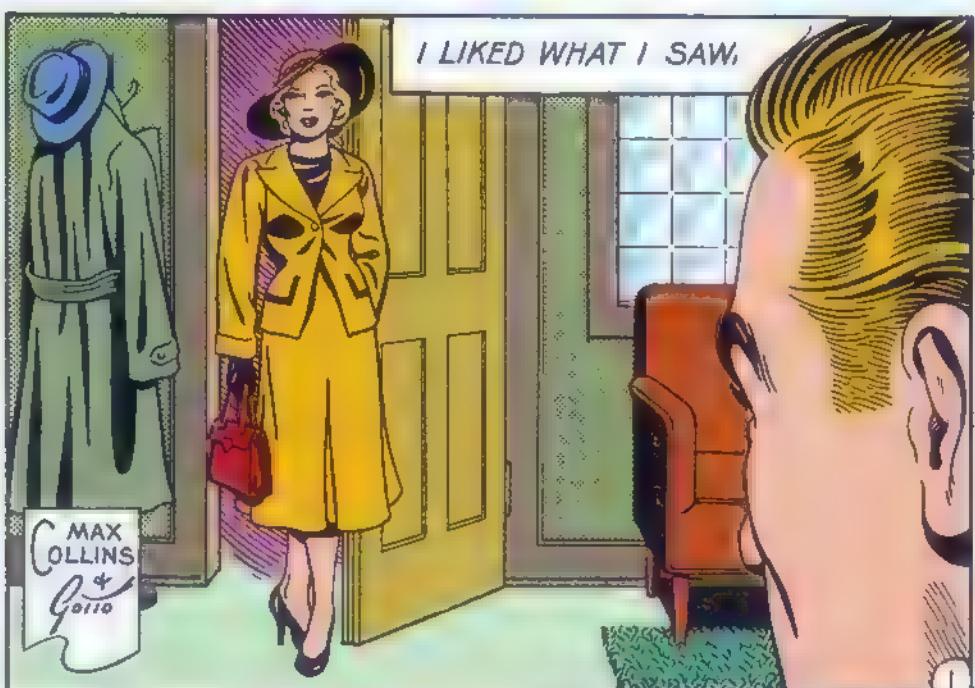
THEY AREN'T ALL BUMS OUT THERE. MOST ARE. NOT ALL.

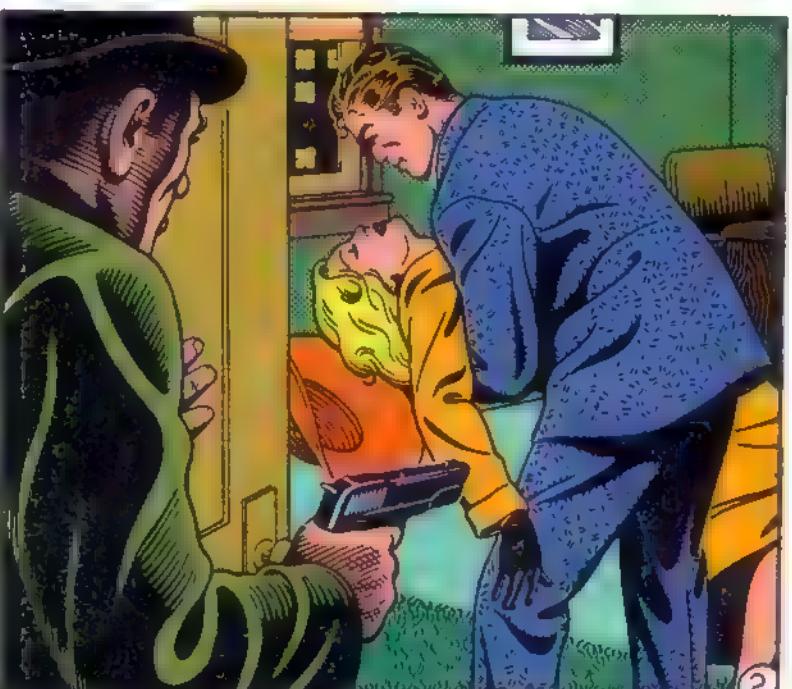


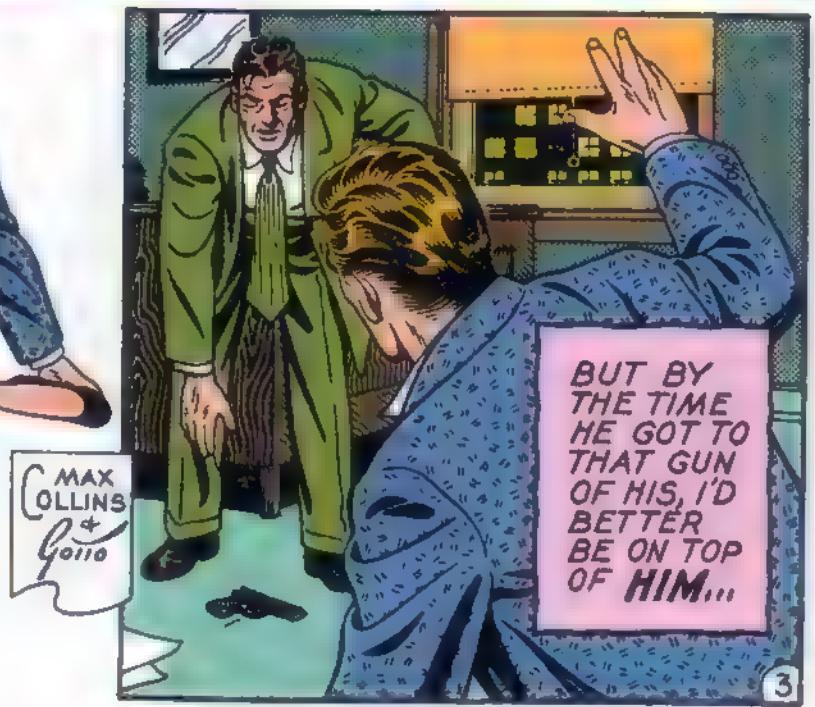
ESPECIALLY NOT THE GIRL WHO, NOT SO LONG AGO, CAME KNOCKING AT MY OFFICE DOOR...

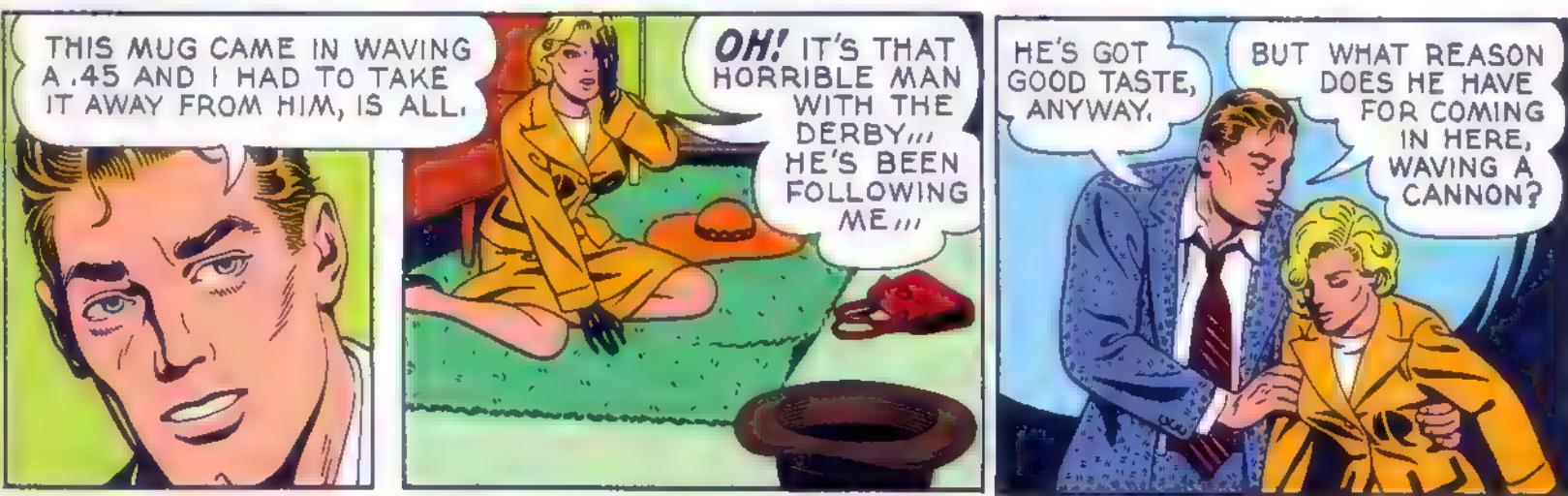
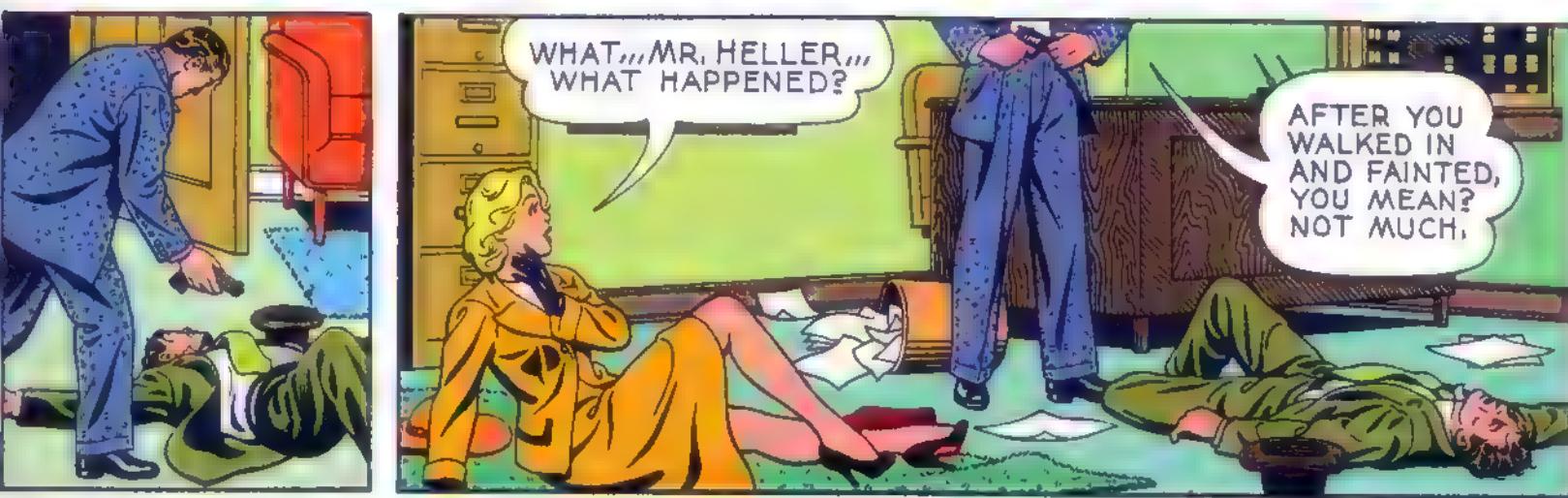


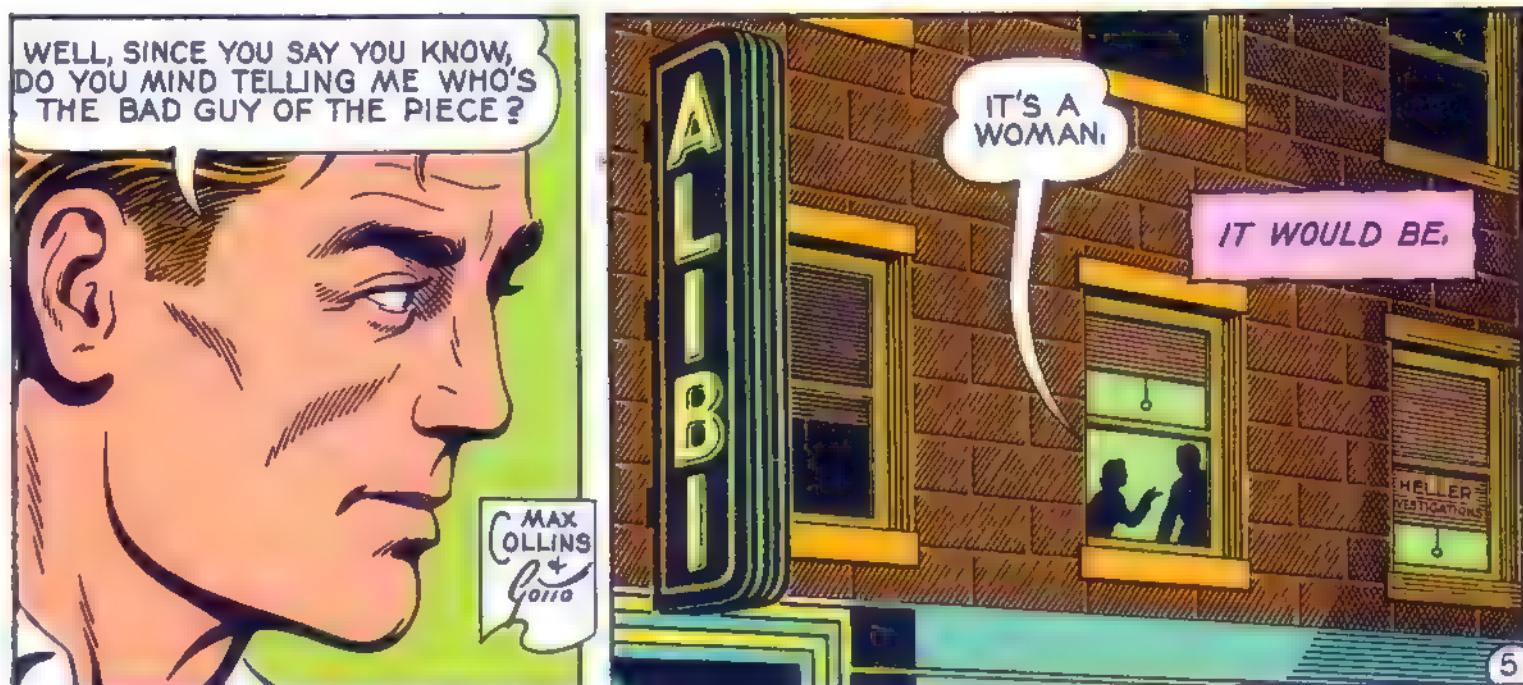
I LIKED WHAT I SAW.

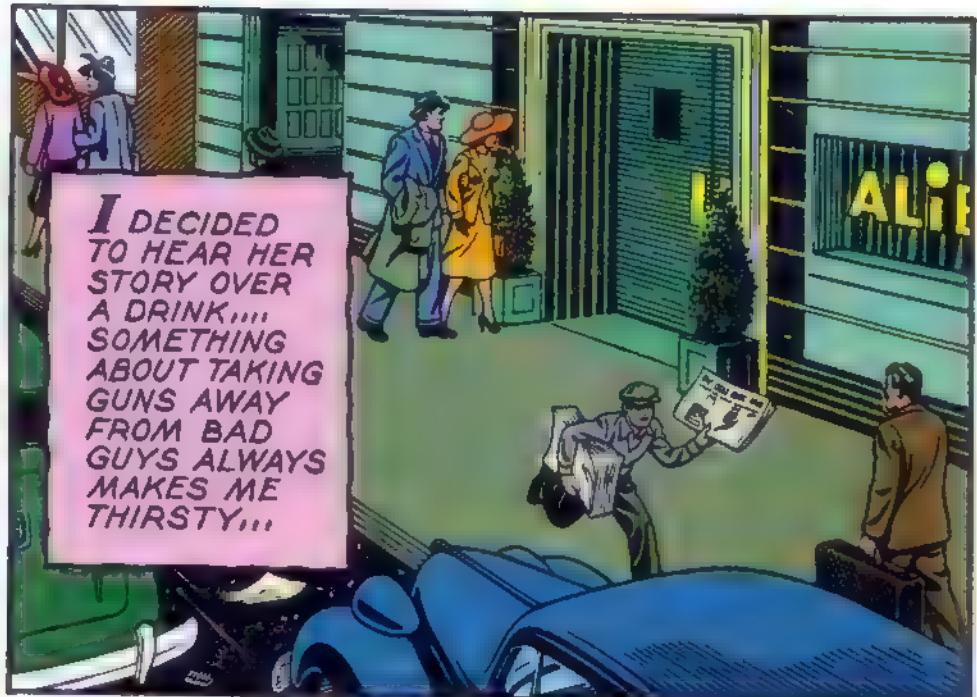


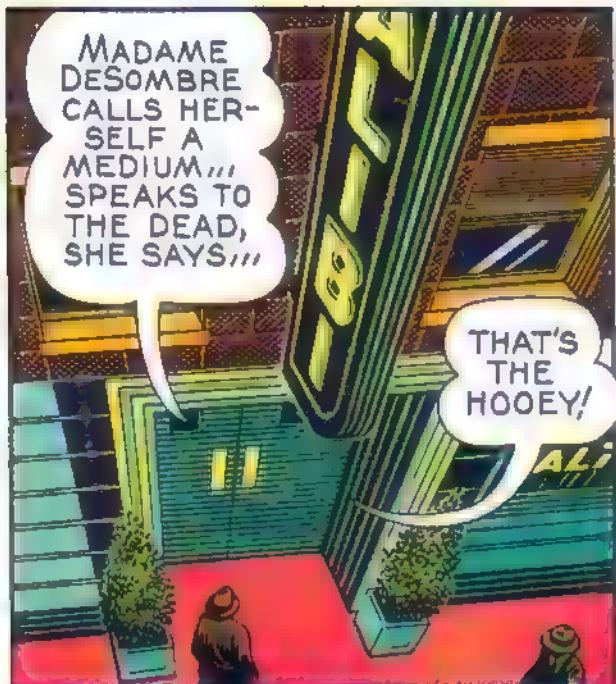
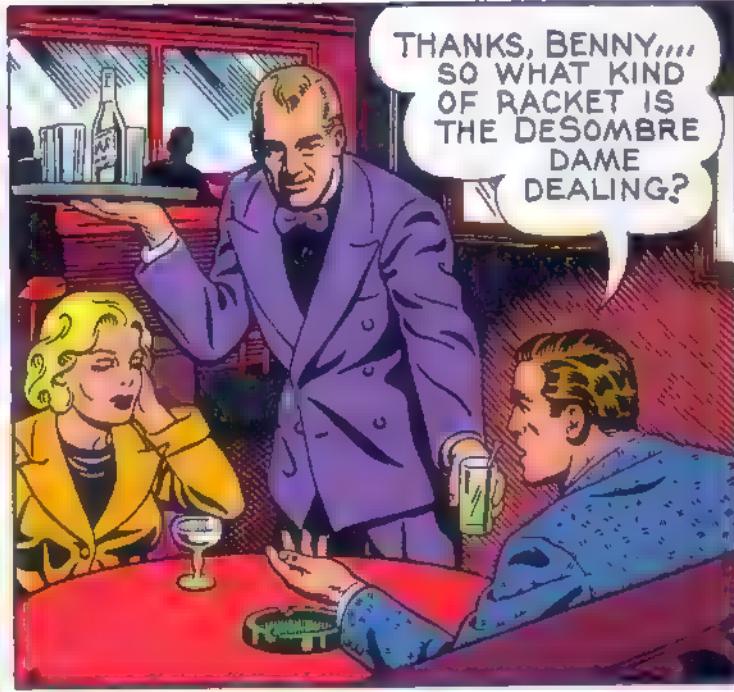












Heaven AND HELLER

The two thugs take Heller to meet their employer: Madame DeSombre.

In a secluded Frank Lloyd Wright-style country home, the dark-haired, agelessly beautiful, exotically sensuous mystery woman holds court: she apologizes to Heller for the rudeness of her help, referring to the two gun-wielding thugs. She claims she was afraid Mrs. Houdini's young companion, Heaven, had gone to him with wild stories, in an effort to stir up trouble for the well-meaning Madame DeSombre.

Heller replies that her fears were justified — he says he smells a con game in the air, and has been hired to see that nobody gets bilked.

Madame DeSombre points out that Heaven's own story is patently ridiculous, and that if anyone is a con artist in this "game" it is the preposterously angelic amnesiac, Heaven. Madame DeSombre goes on to claim that she is a bona fide spiritualist.

"It's a religion," she says, and reaching "beyond the pale" is a gift that comes only to true believers. When Heller laughs at this, Madame DeSombre merely gives him an enigmatic smile.

There is a test, she says, that will prove the dead can in fact be reached. It is a test that all other mystics contacted by Mrs. Houdini have failed to pass. The great magician, on his death-bed, instructed his wife to make repeated efforts to contact him "beyond"; Houdini himself had tried to do this in the case of his mother, and in the course of his quest became famous as a debunker of would-be mediums. Before he died, Houdini gave his wife a message which he would send to her "from beyond" through some *real* medium; only Mrs. Houdini herself knew this message . . .

"So, if I am a fraud," Madame DeSombre points out, "it will soon become apparent: the final Houdini seance, on the tenth anniversary of his death, will be held in a few days, at radio station WOZ, broadcast live, with Walter Winchell himself in attendance."

Madame DeSombre says she sees no reason for a private detective to be involved, but has no real objection either, as long as there is no harassment. Heller assures her there will be none, but wonders aloud why the "honest" medium Madame DeSombre is attended by two thugs like the guy in the derby and his pal? Merely bodyguards provided by old friends, she says.

"I have many friends," she says, and suggests that Heller become one of them. She kisses him. Tentatively. He kisses her. Not tentatively. In the hall the two bodyguards sit exchanging looks that might be disgust — or jealousy.

Later Heller meets Mrs. Houdini for the first time, an attractive white-haired lady of about sixty, who had often shared the stage with her husband. He tells her he does in fact feel a con game is afoot, but cannot prove it — particularly if Mrs. Houdini insists on believing in the possibility of such spiritual hocus-pocus as "visions" (he says, with a pointed look at Heaven, who does not seem at all offended, but rather glad to see Heller again, and at work to help her benefactress, Bess Houdini).

Heller goes to visit his friend Captain Stoner, the crippled, desk-bound, honest cop who works in a skid row precinct house. He asks Stoner about Madame DeSombre, and Stoner says she has no criminal record but is well-known — she has been involved in various large-scale con games, and the story goes she was a "hos-

tess" in a Hong Kong "house of pleasure" at sixteen, a rum-runner at twenty, and in recent years involved in narcotics smuggling and white slaving, with definite mob ties.

"Is there anything she hasn't done?" Heller asks. "Yup," says Stoner. "Get caught."

That evening Heller accompanies Heaven and Mrs. Houdini to dinner at a nightclub where Goldini, a former protege of Houdini's, is performing, doing several of Houdini's famous tricks. Madame DeSombre makes an entrance, accompanied by Winchell. Heller squirms as Heaven and Madame DeSombre exchange cold looks and colder words. Winchell says he's looking forward to the seance next evening.

Heller shows Mrs. Houdini and Heaven to their hotel suite, and, left alone with Heller, Heaven mentions hesitantly that she has recently had another vision . . . flames, and someone trapped.

Heller senses the girl, while deluded, is sincere. He tells her, gently, not to worry. They kiss. He touches her face and leaves.

In a studio at the radio station, the seance takes place. Bess Houdini first gasps, then breaks down weeping when she hears the "message" — actually a song, the first song the Houdinis sang on stage together — come correctly from the lips of a medium, specifically the apparently vindicated Madame DeSombre.

But Heller interrupts, and suggests a cruel hoax has been played upon Mrs. Houdini and all concerned. Mrs. Houdini had commented to Heller that her husband's former protege, Goldini, would often stop by to see her, and that he had been a "relaxing influence" upon her. Heller has noted that Goldini used hypnotism as a part of his act, and suggests that the trusted ex-protege has used hypnosis to pry from Mrs. Houdini the words that her husband, on his death bed, entrusted to his wife.

Heller continues. A friend among the local police (Capt. Stoner) has told him Goldini, a.k.a. Adam Johnson, has a reputation for losing badly at gambling — and word has it Goldini/Johnson is into local gamblers for heavy gambling losses. Goldini is clearly paying off his debt by aiding Madame DeSombre, whose long history of moving in mob circles is well-known.

Goldini panics and rushes for the door — Heller tackles him, they struggle, and during the struggle Madame DeSombre, grabbing an automatic from her purse, takes Heaven at gun point with her and flees the studio, with Heller in pursuit.

But Madame DeSombre is, if nothing else, a master strategist — she has two cars waiting, one of them driven by the guy with the derby, whom she turns Heaven over to, departing in a separate car, in another direction, knowing that Heller will pursue the car carrying the hostage Heaven.

And he does; a high speed chase ensues, the front car tipping over, bursting in flame — horrified, Heller leaps from his own car, runs to the wreck where he rescues Heaven, but the trapped-behind-the-wheel guy in the derby dies a fiery death.

Mrs. Houdini, on this, the tenth anniversary of her husband's death, gives up her quest: tonight has been the final Houdini seance.

THE END

Heaven AND HELLER



MADAME DE SOMBRE

Notes from SURF CITY

catherine yronwode

THE FIRST SUNBURN OF THE SEASON: Spring time is with us again; i can tell by the nifty airbrush effects on my skin. I look like something marked up for mechanical colour separations thusly: "Y2R2 fleshtone bathing suit image on Y2R3 hot pink skin/(A) airbrush lace trim on suit, backs of legs, shoulders, nose, etc." Ah, the first sunburn of the season! It stings for a little while, but it betokens so much pleasure yet to come. . .

One of the nicest of the pleasures heralded by spring's first sunburn is the annual Eclipse Summer Outing. Dean and i will be going to three comic book conventions this summer. For the employees of other comics houses, con-going usually means a hasty flight from one airport to another, a cab ride to some faceless hotel room, a few hours meeting and greeting anonymous fans, a cab ride back to the airport, a flight to the point of origin, and back to the office next morning.

We don't do things like that at Eclipse. For one thing, we are our own bosses, so we can give ourselves a break now and then. For another thing, we happen to enjoy the almost-lost American hobby of motoring. (For those who don't remember it, "motoring" means travelling by scenic routes from here to there and back again, stopping along the way to eat in small cafes, admire the view, take photographs of unusual examples of architecture, buy fresh fruit at roadside stands, and read all those little bronze historical markers describing famous battles and the birthplaces of presidents.)

But, you might be wondering, how do all the comic books get published if the editors and publishers are motoring hither and yon from one convention to another?

I'm glad you asked that. It gives me a chance to provide an unsolicited testimonial for our partners-in-motoring, the wonderful people who run the Federal Express courier service. You see, with Federal Express overnight delivery, we can telephone Mark Evanier in Los Angeles, tell him to send the next issue of *Crossfire* to the Federal Express Office in, say, New Orleans, pick up the book, proofread it in our hotel room, make whatever corrections are needed, drop it off at Federal for overnight delivery to the colour separators, and be on our way, motoring into the sunset with nary a wasted moment.

In fact, between telephone company calling cards, modem hook-ups for word processors to typesetting houses, Federal Express overnight service, and the like, it should be possible to edit and publish comics, books, and magazines while motoring cross country perpetually in nothing larger than an Airstream trailer. Hmmm. . . maybe next year. . .

Seriously though, Dean and i will be going to three comic cons this summer, and if you want to show us your portfolio, get advance info on upcoming Eclipse projects, or just come over and say hello, here's where to look for us:

San Diego Trade Expo/Comicon: June 26 - 27 is the Trade Expo for comics publishers; the regular Comicon runs from June 28 - July 1. In addition to the two of us, other Eclipse people present will be *Marshall Rogers (Cap'n Quick and a Foozle, Scorpio Rose, Coyote)*, *B.C. Boyer*

(*The Masked Man*), *Mark Evanier, Will Meugniot, Dan Spiegle, Al Gordon, Rick Hobberg* and others from the *DNAgents, Crossfire* and *Surge* crews. You'll also be able to meet many of the fine artists and writers whose work appears in *Star*Reach Classics*. San Diego is the Big One, so if you can make it, you'll be up to your eyeballs in comic book, newspaper strip, and underground writers and artists!

Dallas Fantasy Fair: July 6 - 8. This is a new one for us, and we're going there in hopes of meeting folks as yet unmet, looking over the portfolios of aspiring new artists, and checking out Dallas' contributions to the fine art of barbequeing.

Atlanta Fantasy Fair: August 3 - 4. Having always enjoyed the work produced by Atlanta's semi-pro and fan publishers, we decided to attend the Atlanta con and see for ourselves what is going on in the area. Portfolio perusal and panel discussions will once again be the order of the day.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE FUNNYBOOK FARM: Time for a few words of unabashed editorial enthusiasm: Doug Wildey's magnificently drawn Rio series returns in *Eclipse Monthly* no. 9 and 10, with a gorgeous cover painting of Rio guaranteeing that issue no. 10 will jump right off the racks and into your arms! . . . Summer signals the coming of the *DNAgents Dynasty* as the stories in *DNAgents, Crossfire* and the *Surge Miniseries* weave in and out of each other under the direction of Mastermind Mark Evanier. . . In *Aztec Ace* no. 3 and 4, Bridget (and the readers!) begin to learn more about the quixotic Avenger of Time's Suffering, while Ace himself must travel to ancient Egypt in search of "Mummy Dust" and "Necropolis Nights" . . . Zot! is off to a hot start, and things get hotter - fast - as writer-artist Scott McCloud introduces the next Great Villain of our times - DEKKO! This guy is so bizarre he makes even the book's editors' short hairs tingle. Straight from the heart of the Collective Unconscious! . . . All you Marshall Rogers devotees can hang in there - 'cause *Cap'n Quick & a Foozle* is definitely wending its way toward you. More details next month on this and *Scorpio Rose*, which Marshall is producing with the help of Michael Hernandez. These two guys are working overtime to bring you the best art money can buy, so be patient and (dare i say it?) keep the faith! . . . Finally, Howard Chaykin fans should be on the look-out for *Star*Reach Classics* no. 5 because that's the one with Chaykin and Len Wein's *Gideon Faust* cover-featured and starring in his own full-colour adventure. It's a treat you will not want to miss!

Would you believe i've run out of hype for this month? You wouldn't? You mean you want me to remind you to put in your order for those fabulous Eclipse character tee-shirts you see advertised all over the place? You say you can't wait for me to explain the neat shipping schedule which will ensure that you can obtain a new *DNAgents Dynasty* title three out of every four weeks in the month? You hint that this edition of *Surf City* is incomplete without a glowing paean of praise for new *Sabre* artist Jose Ortiz? You ask for updates on the exploits of *Ms. Tree* and *Destroyer Duck*?

Sorry. No can do. I'm out of space! Maybe next time, okay?

- cat

MS. TREE

"THE COLD DISH"

© 1984

Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter Ten

MURDER-GO-ROUND

HALFWAY UP A WINDING MOUNTAIN ROAD, A PRIVATE DRIVE JOGGED OFF AND UP A STEEP WOODED SLOPE. BUT WE PULLED OFF ON A SHOULDER JUST PAST THE DRIVE... MY PARTNER ROGER FREEMONT STAYED WITH THE CAR, WHILE THE REST OF US CUT UP THROUGH THE WOODS, ON FOOT —

"THE REST OF US" WAS ME, BRYAN HAND, WALTER BOOKER AND JASON EDWARDS — AN UNLIKELY COMMANDO UNIT, TO SAY THE LEAST... ESPECIALLY SINCE I CONSIDERED EDWARDS A SHALLOW, VENAL JERK, AND BOOKER A HYPOCRITICAL MURDERING SON OF A BITCH.

BUT WE HAD ONE COMMON BOND, BOOKER AND EDWARDS AND I — AND PROBABLY MR. HAND, TOO: WE ALL LOVED THE BOY. WE LOVED MIKE, JR.

BOOKER HAD BEEN SURPRISINGLY WILLING —

I MAY NEED YOU TO TELL YOUR STORY — TO CONVINCE THEM THE LEDGER IS DESTROYED —

NO PROBLEM — YOU COULDN'T STOP ME FROM COMING ALONG IF YOU TRIED...



DEAR — WHERE ARE YOU OFF TO?

YOUR HUSBAND AND I HAVE SOME PROBLEMS WE'RE GOING TO TRY TO RESOLVE, CONCERNING MIKE JR.'S CUSTODY.



WILL MIKE JR. BE COMING TO LIVE WITH US, WALTER?

HARRIET, ALL I CAN SAY IS MS. TREE AND I HAVE COME TO THE UNDERSTANDING THAT WE BOTH HAVE MIKE'S BEST INTERESTS AT HEART —



IT WAS LATE IN THE DAY, BUT EDWARDS WAS STILL AT WORK —

YOU'RE AN INDUSTRIOUS FELLA, AREN'T YOU, EDWARDS?

I'VE LOST ALL PATIENCE TRYING TO DEAL WITH YOU, LADY — BEAT IT.



I UNDERSTAND YOU BUILT DOMINIC MUERTA A LITTLE COTTAGE — GOT THE BLUEPRINTS AROUND?

WHY? WHAT'S IT TO YOU?



I'LL MAKE IT WORTH YOUR WHILE.



EDWARDS GOT COOPERATIVE, HOWEVER, WHEN HE LEARNED HIS FORMER STEPSON WAS IN DANGER —

HERE'S THE MAIN FLOOR PLAN ...



AND INSISTED ON ACCOMPANYING US — I'D EVEN GIVEN HIM A SIDEARM... THOUGH I HADN'T GIVEN BOOKER A WEAPON. HE WOULDN'T NEED ONE.

THAT PLACE WOULD BE EASILY DEFENSIBLE AGAINST THE NATIONAL GUARD LET ALONE THE FOUR OF US —



OKAY, BOOKER — DO YOUR STUFF. SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE UP FOR BEING THE LOUSE OF THE CENTURY —

YOU'RE SO DAMN SMUG...



WHAT HAVE I DONE, COMPARED TO YOU? IT'S YOUR RECKLESSNESS THAT'S ENDANGERED MY GRANDSON!



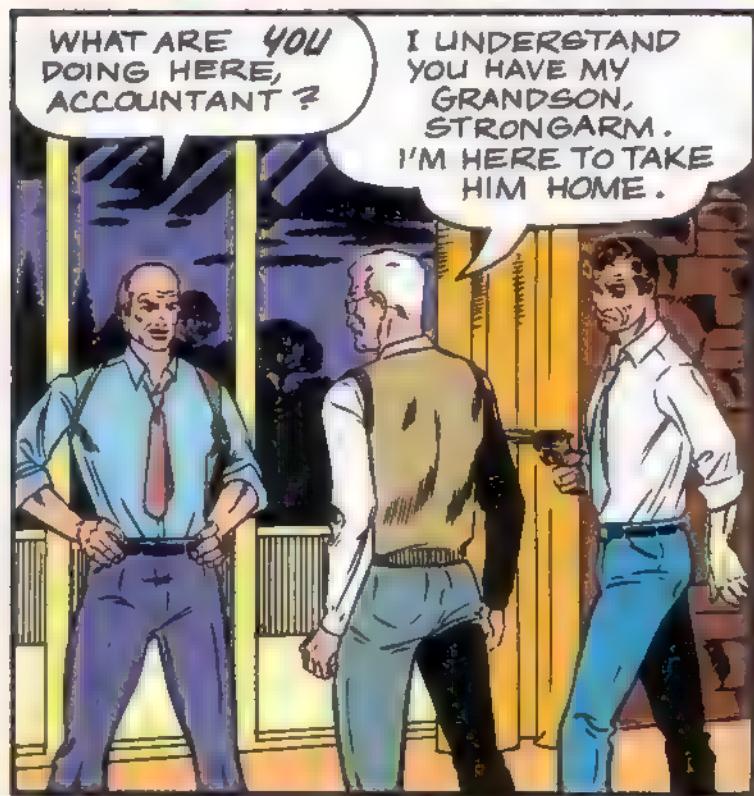
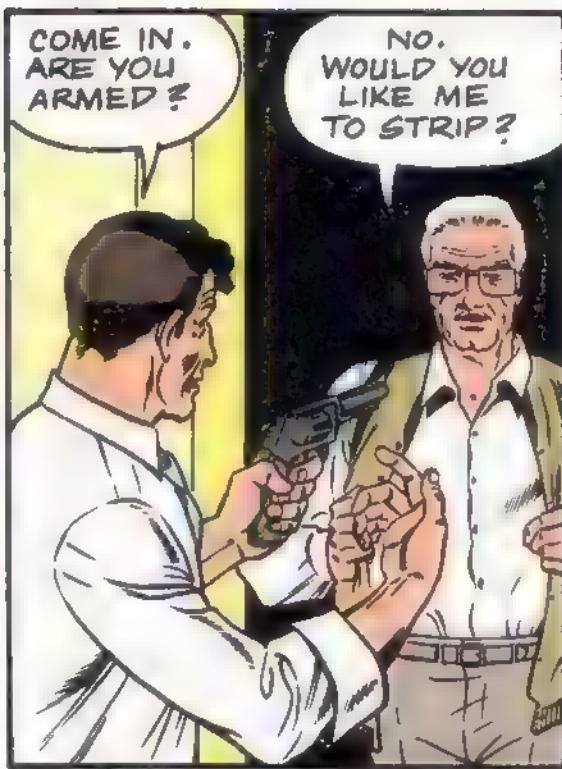
I SUGGEST THE TWO OF YOU DISCUSS YOUR DIFFERENCES ANOTHER TIME. MR. BOOKER, WHAT SAY WE GET ON WITH THE SHOW?



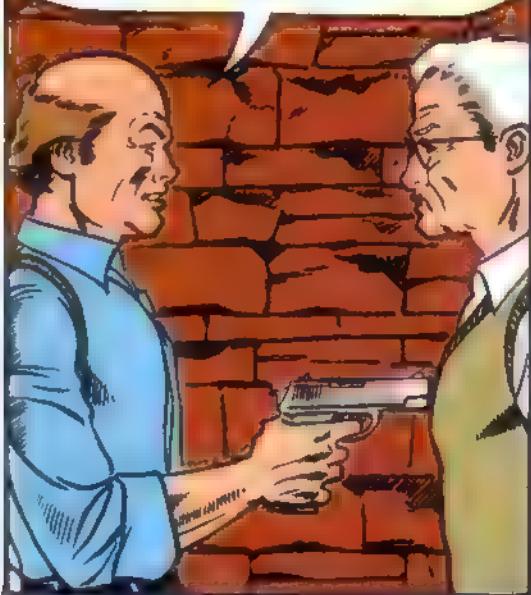
BOOKER! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHAT D'YOU WANT?

I PRESUME LAMBERT'S IN CHARGE. TELL HIM I'M HERE.





YOU DROP BY AND THE PHONES ARE ALL OF A SUDDEN DEAD. MAYBE YOU'D LIKE TO BE, TOO, BOOKER —



HEY— YOU!



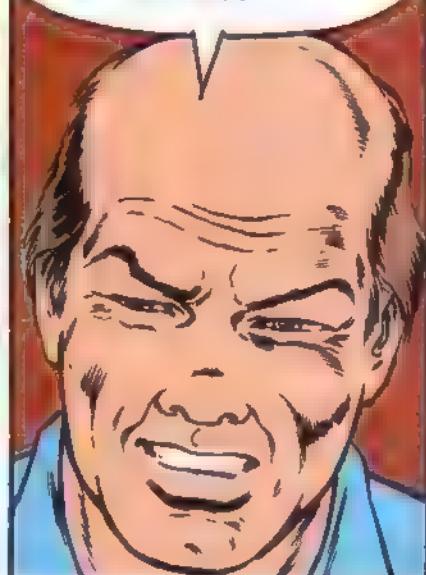
I KNEW NOTHING ABOUT THE PHONES. I'M HERE BECAUSE I EXPLAINED TO MR. M THAT ALL COPIES OF THE LEDGER HAVE BEEN DESTROYED. THERE'S NO LEDGER TO TRADE —



"DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?"



UNTIL THE PHONE'S WORKING AGAIN, AND WE CAN VERIFY WHAT YOU'VE SAID, I DON'T UNDERSTAND NOTHIN'—

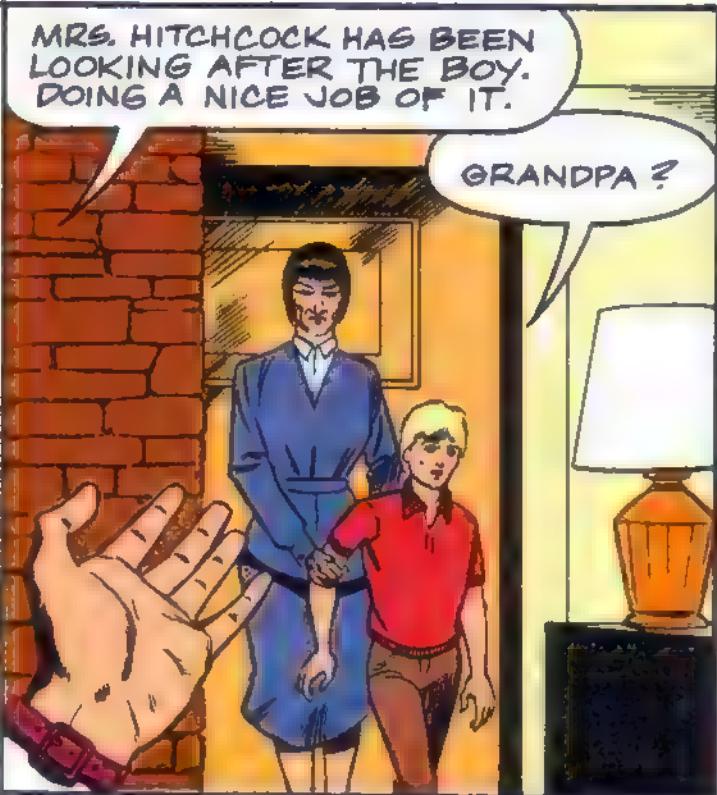


"BUT WE'LL GIVE YOU YOUR WISH, BOOKER — YOU CAN BE REUNITED WITH YOUR GRANDSON ... "



MRS. HITCHCOCK HAS BEEN LOOKING AFTER THE BOY. DOING A NICE JOB OF IT.

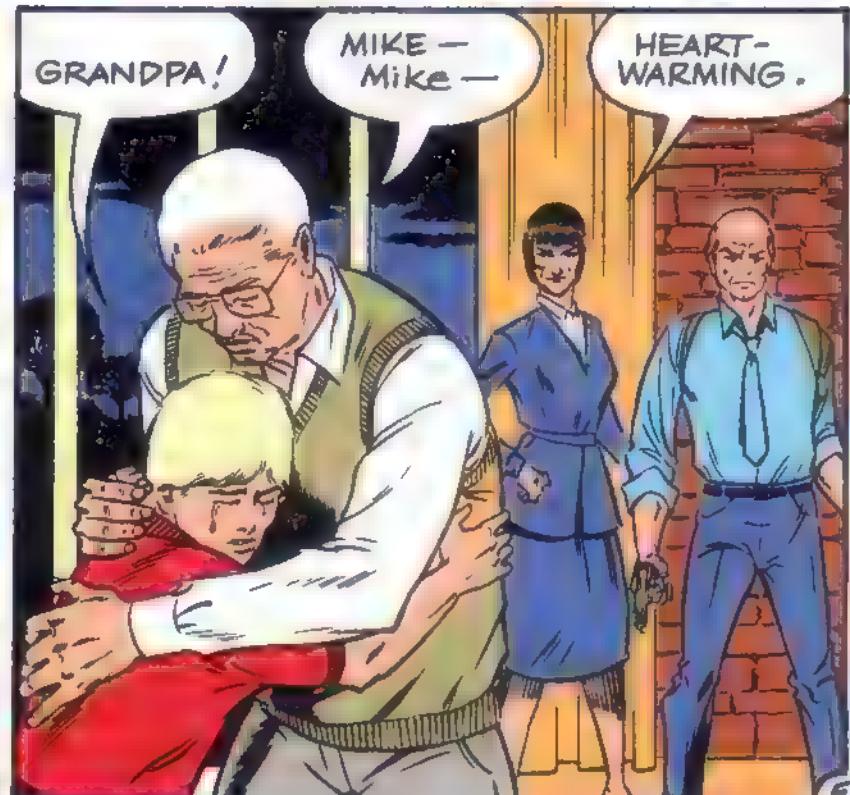
GRANDPA?



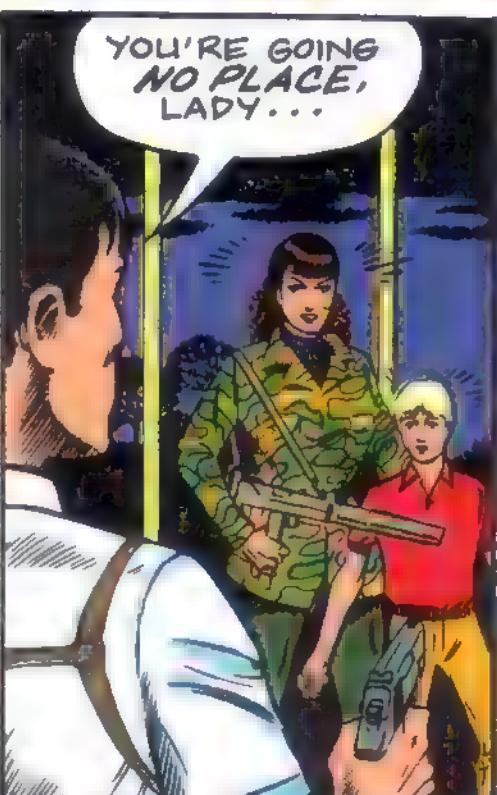
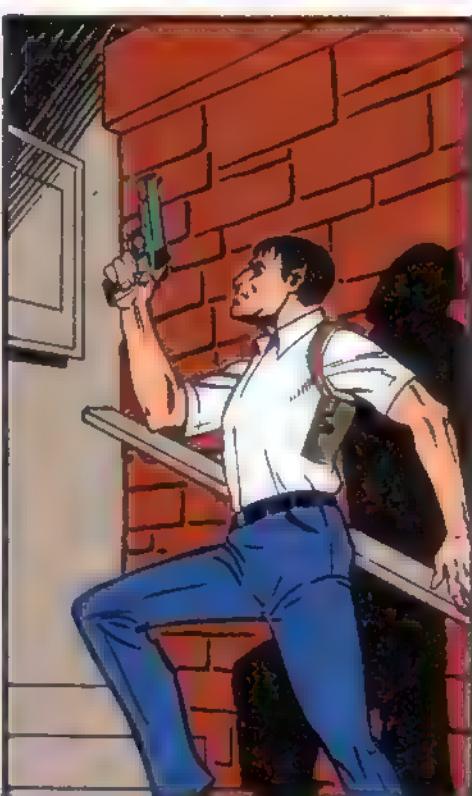
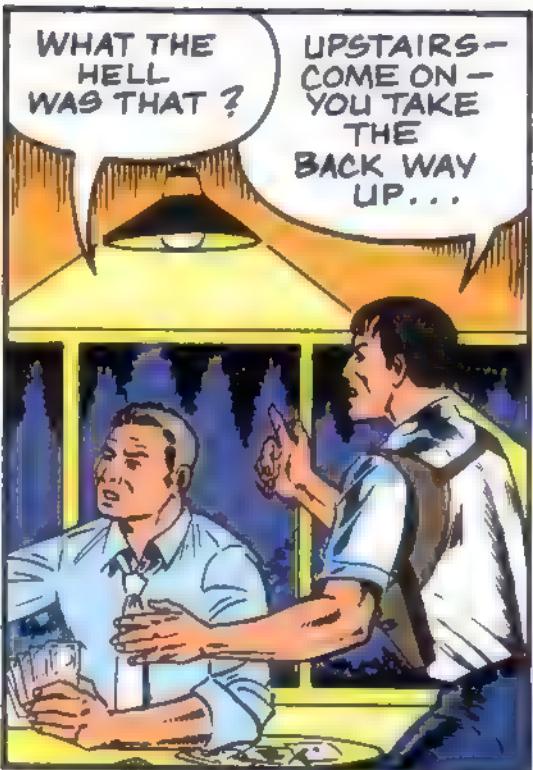
GRANDPA!

MIKE —
Mike —

HEART-
WARMING .

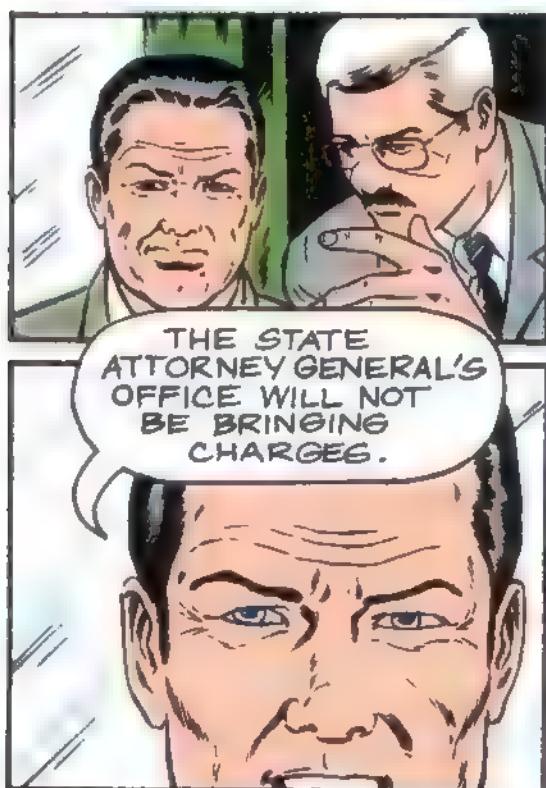
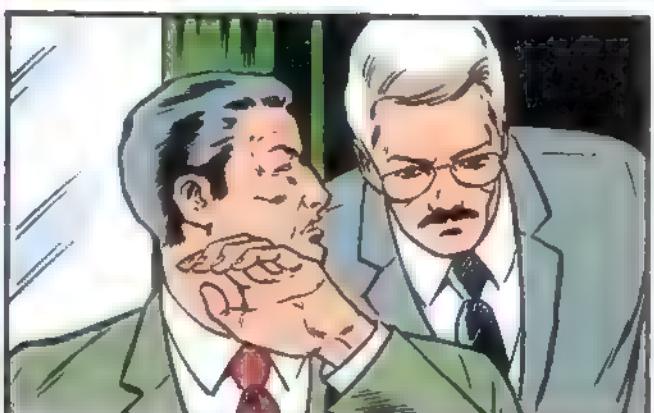






SEVEN PEOPLE DIED AT THAT HOUSE, MS. TREE - SEVEN PEOPLE YOU KILLED. I INCLUDE BOOKER... FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, YOU CAUSED HIS DEATH, AS WELL.

ACTUALLY, MR. HAND KILLED TWO OF THEM. BUT YOU'RE FORGETTING THE HIT-AND- RUN HITMAN, AND THE "DOCTOR" I SHOT. THAT'D MAKE NINE. STILL, WHO'S COUNTING?



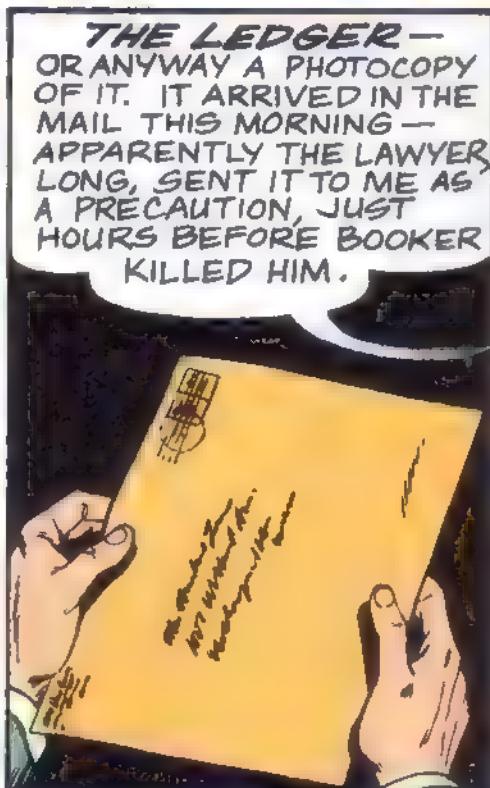
DON'T IMAGINE YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH THIS WHOLE-SALE SLAUGHTER FOREVER, LADY. DON'T IMAGINE YOUR NEXT STOP IS DOMINIC MUERTA — THAT YOU CAN BLOW HIM AWAY WITH IMPUNITY.

YOU'VE HAD ALL THE FREE RIDES ON THE MURDER-GO-ROUND YOU GET — NEXT TIME, SISTER, YOU PAY.

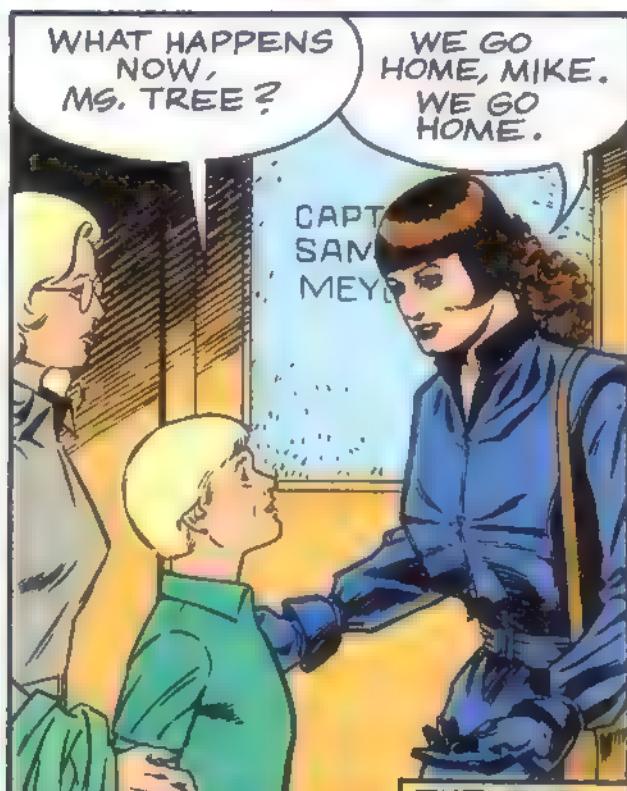
THERE'LL BE NO NEXT TIME. IT'S OVER. THE MUERTA CASE IS IN YOUR HANDS NOW... YOU AND VALER.



I'VE HAD ENOUGH. MIKE JR. — MY... SON — ALMOST DIED AS A RESULT OF MY VENDETTA. AND DAN GREEN'S LOST... SO MUCH. SO MANY OTHERS... TOO MANY OTHERS, HAVE DIED...



YOU'VE GOT ALL YOU NEED TO PROSECUTE MUERTA, NOW. AND WHEN YOU SHUT THE DOOR ON HIM, SLAM IT — I WANT HIS EARS TO RING TILL JUDGMENT DAY.



THE END

to Ed Robbins

**TWICE UPON A TIME, IT TOOK TIME
TO MAKE A HERO...**

AND IN THE TIME YOU JUST TOOK
TO BLINK, HE CRASHED EVERY
MOMENT OF INFINITY, MAKING
THE PAST SAFE FROM THE FUTURE.

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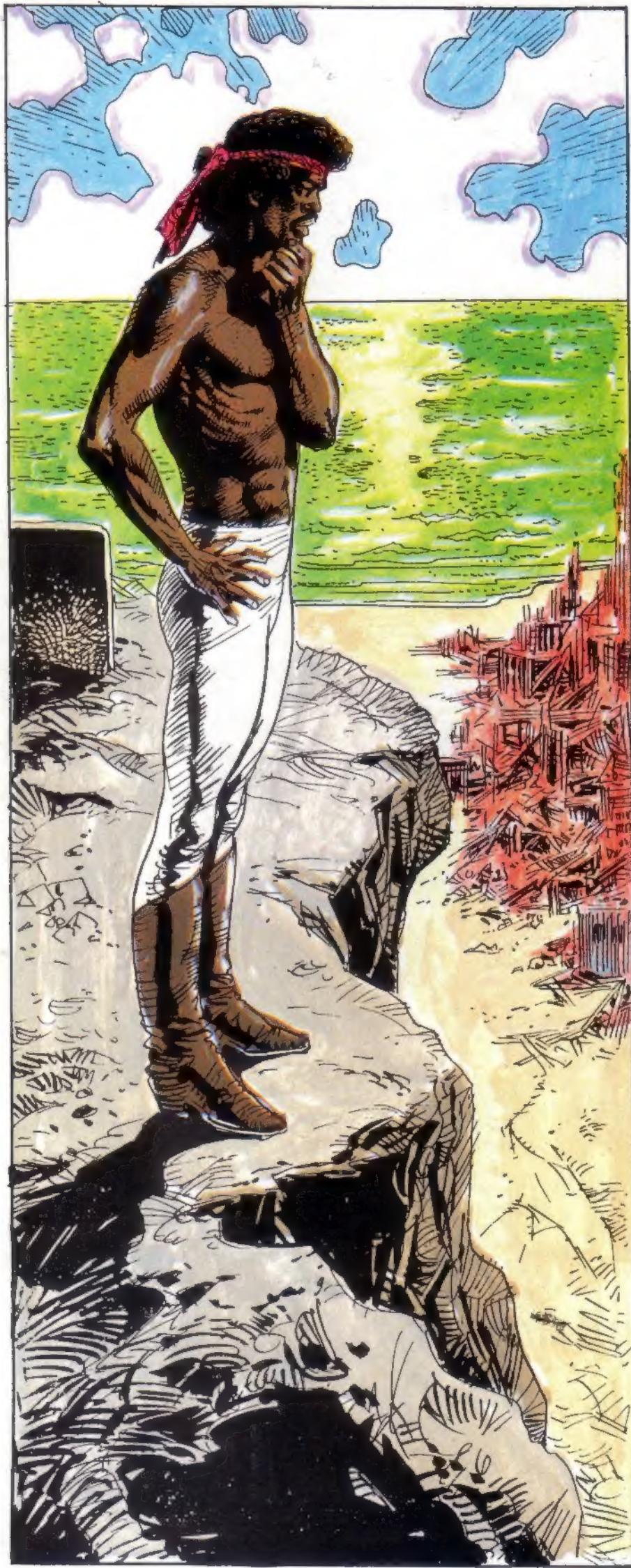
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